BT

Why the Internet?

- It's an essential business tool
- There are no trade boundaries
- Your customers are using it
- Your competitors may be using it

The Internet is fast becoming an essential business tool as well as a growing way to reach your market, and more of your customers, suppliers and competitors are getting online every day.

The Internet isn't just today's technology or a place for games and trivia, it's a place where business people can conduct efficient business, worldwide or nationally, every day. Research suggests that there are 31 million people prepared to buy products and services worldwide over the Internet*.

By 2003 this will have increased to 183 million, generating revenues in excess of $1 trillion.

Other predictions suggest there will be over 200,000 websites in the UK by the year 2000**.

So whether you want to become one of the new web sites to expand your business, or use the Internet and Email to help you work more efficiently and access useful services, it's important to start now.

*IDC Research
**Datamonitor

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Business Benefits

By going online today, you get 3 immediate benefits. You get access to email, you can use content and services relevant to your business and you can build a website for your business.

Email saves you time and money

- Communicate more efficiently
- Send multiple messages cost effectively
- Deliver documents of any size
- Join useful news groups and subscribe to customisable updates

Email is a very efficient means of communicating, and it keeps you in touch with your customers, suppliers and staff. Type in what you need to say and send it, at any time of the day or night and from anywhere to anyone worldwide. Send larger documents (as attachments) -there's no limit to the size - from brief memos to business proposals hundreds of pages long. Sending a message to dozens of recipients simultaneously saves time in preparation and costs in postage or faxing the same information. Also, via Email, you'll be able to access bulletin boards and mailing lists that are relevant to your business where information and advice can be sought and delivered almost any time.

Better business intelligence

- get up to date market research & information
- access real time news feeds & magazines
- access competitors and suppliers information
- keep up to date on industry issues
- useful services that save you time in managing your businesses

So many different events and factors affect your business, it's hard to know where to look for the most up-to-date advice and information. When time is precious, and you need to find something quickly, portals (specially built "gateways" to information) can offer the most efficient means of getting what you need by acting as an Internet editor. btclick for business, a portal for businesses like yours, offers a broad range of business information that has already been evaluated by our team of experts.

btclick.com
for business

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When you first get online your home page will be a large and specially developed website that we have created and continually improve with businesses like yours in mind. We have scoured the Internet looking for the most relevant websites and services, so you will spend your time online constructively from day one. At any time you can leave our site to search for material that will be more specific to your individual needs. Here is an outline of the content on the btclick for business home page.

Information Channels

News and finance: a feed from Reuters is updated every 20 minutes with general news, business and sport.
(Other links: Reuters news feed, BBC Online, FT.com, and The Guardian)

Travel: make bookings and pay online for hotel, train and car reservations in your own time and with links to other services. (Other links: Railtrack timetable, RAC Route planner, arrival and departure boards at airports, BTís electronic travel agent)

Money and Finance: links to venture capitalists, electronic investing, accountancy, taxation and insurance plus UK banks and credit checking companies. (Other links: Equifax credit checking, International Insurance portal, Nat Westís small business site)

Markets and Companies: news feed from the markets, links to trade databases, government departments and export companies. (Other links: Reuters market news, International Small Business Consortium, Public Services Directory, CBI, Economist Intelligence Unit)

Legal and regulatory: find organisations specialising in consumer, government and employment law as well as patent databases and general links. (Other links: UK Business Bureau, Cyberspace Law Centre, and Financial Services Authority)

Computing and IT : a wealth of news stories and resources to develop your understanding of the Internet, plus IT strategy guides and help on Y2K issues. (Other links: news feed from ZDNet, Silicon Valley and VNU)

Human Resources: providing links to training and motivational sites as well as a legal library on HR issues to keep up with legislation. (Other links: PeopleBank, Investors in People, Industrial Society, Institute for Personnel Development)

Events: giving an exhaustive list of the forthcoming trade shows and events in a variety of sectors to help you plan your forthcoming trips. (Other links: a comprehensive outline of websites with information on specific trade shows and facilities)

Directories: lists of people who provide detailed company information when you need to find local suppliers fast. (Other links: Kompass, Kellys Directories, BTís Trade Park, Trade UK, Industry Net, Directory of Trade Associations)

Distribution : covering all the major parcel distribution companies ready for when you need to get products to customers quickly, or preparing to despatch product ordered from your online store. (Other links: DHL, ParcelForce, UPS, FedEx, and TNT)

Order online: buy in services and products from areas such as IT and telecomms, office equipment, supplies, books, security, finance, lifestyle, travel, motoring often at reduced costs. (Other links: SoftWare Warehouse, Viking Direct, Books Online (BOL), Midland Business Banking)

A company website acts as an online showroom

- Marketing to a wider audience
- Save money on printed brochures
- Give customers a more efficient way of finding information about you
- Create two way or real time dialogue with your customers
- Generate new revenue from selling online
- Reduce cost of sales

Once you have a website, you can cost effectively market your products and services to a much wider audience. The site can be easily updated to include new products, special offers and marketing campaigns - much more quickly than printed brochures. A website will also allow your customers to talk to you, give feedback, and youíll be able to answer them. And once you're sure, you can buy packages that will get you selling online, opening new revenue streams.

Internet Basics

How does it work?

The Internet was developed in the 1960s in the USA as a way of distributing information over a huge geographical area. It uses many networks of computers, rather than one central point to transmit information. When you connect to the Internet, (or "go online" or "surf the web"), your individual computer uses a phone line to talk to a much more powerful computer, the "server". Information shown in the form of websites, each made up of a number of web pages, is accessed via the server to which you connect (as well as others all over the world). The servers are inter-connected and talk the same computer language, called HTTP (HyperText Transfer Protocol).

When your computer requests information, the server finds it from an even bigger server and sends it down the phone line for display on your screen. This global information (or data) transfer happens in seconds, and you usually pay local call rates for the time you spend connected to the Internet, even if you are looking at a website in Australia or sending email to a client in Japan.

How does my computer connect

Modems
Computers talk in a series of 1s and 0s (a digital language), but most phone lines send information as a series of sound waves (an analogue language). When your computer needs to send or receive information via a phone line, it must first translate this information from the digital language to the analogue language. The computer receiving the information then needs to translate the analogue message back into a digital form, which is what a modem does.

Phone Lines
Your computer and modem are the external hardware you need, so now you just use your existing phone line connected to your modem (using an ISP as explained in the next section). In the near future, many of our telephone lines will be fully digital. Some people already have digital lines that use ISDN technology, and BT is currently trailing even faster ways to connect to the Internet.

Service Providers
In order to get onto the Internet, you only need to have access to one server that then talks to the global network. It will send your requests for pages to any other server on the Internet. In order to get access to one server, you need an "Internet Service Provider" (ISP). If you connect using BT's Internet access software on this CD ROM, your ISP will be btclick for business.

Because BT Access is free and you have no ongoing commitment, use it to try the Internet and then decide for yourself if you want to pay for additional services from BT Connect to Business (like credit checking or web hosting) once you've seen the benefits being online can bring.

Each ISP allocates its members a special phone number to access its server. Don't worry, your computer will store the number and dial it automatically after you've installed the software. However, you might wish to keep a record of it for any discount scheme to which you might belong, such as BT's Key Numbers, as your access number is eligible to be part of your calling circle. You will also need to keep a record of your user name and password once it has been allocated, so use the packaging to write these down.

How do I see information

Browsers
In order to see pages on the Internet, you'll need a piece of software called a web browser. Your browser is your window onto the Internet. It sees the information that has come down the phone line and through your modem, and delivers that information to you as pages of text and images, or even animations and video. For a demonstration, see the Online preview section.

The two most widely used browsers are Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. While there are others available, these two are currently the most popular worldwide, especially as most new PCs come complete with browsers. btclick for businesses comes with Microsoft Internet Explorer 5 (IE5), the latest version.

Extra software and plug-ins
Your browser provides all the software you need to see most websites. Many Internet sites now have animations or games, audio and even video, or provide information in printable formats.
Your browser will be able to read most types of files, but the web changes so often that plug-ins, or browser enhancements, are developed and either included in browsers or available to download if you want to extend what you can see online. Using plug-ins allows you to keep your basic browser and favourites the same but still keep up with the latest technology.

A good example is the Real Media plug-in that enables you to see video and listen to audio. Adding plug-ins to your browser is very simple. Most websites that require an updated or additional plug-in for enhanced viewing will usually provide a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) showing you where to download that plug-in and how to use it.

URLs

What are they?

A URL, or Uniform Resource Locator, is the "written address" of a website on the Internet. Your computer reads the URL like the post office reads your address, so it knows where to go to the data you request.

URLs are key to the way that the Internet works. All you need to do is type in a URL and your browser will do the rest. It really is as simple as remembering an address - like www.bt.com - which is why companies are finding it so important to register memorable names. The server could be in Outer Mongolia but it makes no difference as long as you have the right URL. You may hear people talk about "IP addresses", which is a numerical version of a url.

If you look at a URL (or address), it can be broken down into three parts using http://www.xxx.com/yz.htm as an example.

http://

This part of the address tells your browser which language it needs to use to talk to the computer storing the page of Information that you've asked to see. This is called the "protocol" name.

www.xxx.com

The "www" means the page is located on the World Wide Web and the xxx.com is the location of the specific company's (or person's) web site.

/yz.htm

This end element is the exact reference to the page you need on the web site. Or, for big corporate sites, it can be specific parts of a large site or even a password protected area.

What a URL tells you

The URL of a web page tells you a little bit about the nature of the company or organisation publishing the page.

.com = A company-run site

.co.uk = A UK based company-run site

.org = An organisation

.edu = An educational establishment (usually American)

.ac.co.uk = An educational establishment in the UK

.gov = A government-run or sponsored site

.mil = A military-run or sponsored site.

If you know what company is providing the information, try typing www., the company name and then .com or .co.uk. For example, www.companyname.com or www.companyname.co.uk might be the right URL. If you don't reach the site, try a search engine.

The World Wide Web

How does the web work?
You can start using the World Wide Web right now when you install the btclick for business software.

When you use the web, your browser receives a set of instructions telling it how to reconstruct a page to look exactly like the original. These instructions govern the layout of the page, where to find the images and text and links to other pages.

This system means that web pages can be sent at very high speed, and, as long as your browser speaks the same language as other browsers, it can understand how to reconstruct a web page from anywhere in the world.

The instructions are written in a language called HyperText Mark-Up Language or HTML for short. The language is relatively straightforward to learn. It isn't as complex as traditional programming languages and you can even use software that will write it for you.

Discovering how to navigate your way around the web may sound complex, but it's actually really easy. Information on the web is arranged in pages, most of which are collected within individual websites. Each site is then given its own URL (or address) which enables you to visit it directly by typing it into your browser.

Or, when you're browsing the pages on a web site you'll find that certain words or images are highlighted in a different colour, are underlined or contained within a ruled box, or use a different text-style. These are called "links" or "hyperlinks". Each one of these links points to another page on the same web site or another web page anywhere in the world, using the link's URL.

Communicating online

Using Email

Types of Email
There are two types of Email, POP Email and web-based Email.

POP (Point of Protocol) Email uses special software (such as Microsoft Outlook Express) to give you access to your messages and lets you work offline to read them and draft responses before sending them online (through the Internet). Working offline means you don't pay to be connected to the Internet while you read or write messages, and then you just connect when you want to check for new messages or send a message.

Web-based Email services allow you to collect your messages from any computer anywhere, as long as it's connected to the Internet and is particularly good for people who are always on the go. You just have to visit a particular website, log in and pick up your mail. There are free services that forward messages from different Email addresses into one account, just in case you already have another Email account elsewhere (i.e. home). Many websites will even deliver news or industry information straight into your Email.

Talking with other people on the Internet?

Internet Relay Chat
IRC is a particularly popular system because it allows people connected anywhere in the world to participate in live group discussions via the Internet. You type in your comments and others reply - instantly. It doesn't matter if they live in London or New York or Singapore, the Internet brings the world into one room.

Usenet
Another way to communicate via the Internet is by using places called "Bulletin Boards". Rather than "talking" to people in real-time, like you do with IRC, or Emailing them directly, you post messages into a central area where other people can read them. They can then post their reply back onto the Bulletin Board. Usenet is short for User's Network, and is a worldwide system of bulletin boards. There are some 14,000 separate forums, called newsgroups, each of which contain discussions on topics ranging from telecommunications to pig farming! Whatever your business interests, you'll be able to find a forum dedicated to it.
To join a newsgroup you'll need to register but subscription is free and messages may be posted up and responded to either publicly (seen by all) or privately (seen by the sender/recipient only).

Search Engines & Portals

Finding information

Using a "Search Engine"

Because the Internet has grown so rapidly, finding information without help has become increasingly difficult. Search engines are so useful because they can help point you to the right information quickly. Make the most of your Internet time by using search engines more efficiently.

You find search engines by typing in a URL, like any other website. When you have arrived, type in the subject you're researching (current stock prices), and a few seconds later the results of the search (of the web) will be delivered back to you. You then click on the link that looks most relevant (there are short descriptions of the listings) and you will go straight tot the website.

If you try a search using the word "business", you will see thousands of results on your page of links, and might find you are no closer to finding what you want. Make your search more direct by using the hints and tips section of each search engine, because they all work differently.

Web Portals

"Portals" act as content aggregators, or editors, on the web, and the btclick for business is an example of a portal. When you're new to the Internet they're good places from which to start, and our portal has aggregated content specifically related to your business needs.

The good thing about many portals is that the information contained within them is typically organised into helpful categories or "channels", which cover all the main topic areas from news and technology, to entertainment and education. This can make life easier, especially if you don't have the time or patience to look for everything that you want via a search engine.

Shopping & safety

Online shopping
Like every other sector of business, retailers have been quick to grasp the potential of the Internet. Indeed the boom in "Ecommerce" means you can now purchase almost anything via the Internet, simply and safely, from the weekly groceries to next season's Manchester United football strip!

How safe is it?

To begin with, many people were reluctant to use Ecommerce facilities because of fears about privacy and lack of security. However, there have been certain advances in online security, that mean it is now safer to send your credit card details over the Internet than give them by phone.

These include the development of first-class encryption facilities, which scramble your secret details into a code that only the intended recipient can read (like Secure Socket Layering /SSL), and safe servers. If you prefer, most online retailers still give you the option of paying by phone or cheque.

"Cookies" and registrations

Cookies are small files, stored on your hard drive by your web browser. They hold information about your browsing habits and your PC, and are often used to gather information about where a visitor to a site came from, and where they looked on the website they visited.

Alternatively sites may ask for personal details such as your age and address in order to find out who is using their site. Visitors may be asked to fill in a form and the data is then stored on the user's own hard drive as a small "cookie" file which is accessed next time he or she visits that site. If the registration process has asked you to create a user name and password you may have to go through a login procedure to get special or personal information.

If you're concerned that cookies are an invasion of privacy, it is quite simple to open them up and see what they are recording, or you can disable them. Cookies will never store personal information that you haven't volunteered. If you have given personal information, there are data protection laws in place that prevent people using this data without your permission or passing any of this information on to other sites.

My company's web presence

The web is about communication and interaction. It is fascinating and invaluable for making discoveries and for learning. But what if you have something to say or have some information that you'd like to publish on the Internet?

Creating your own personal or business website, or "home page", is remarkably simple. This means that you can be provided with some space on a server where you can store your web pages. You also get the address of the page so anyone, anywhere in the world can visit your site. You are allocated 20Mb of space and we give you easy to use templates to put up a page.

Creating your own www presence

Now you have discovered what the web has to offer, you may feel a sudden urge to join this new world by building your own company website. You have probably noticed that many portal sites on the Internet provide just such an option - an offer that is at once both tempting and daunting to the novice user. But if you would like to try, then you will need to learn something about HTML, the programming language, used to create websites. Several sites will provide everything you need to set up your own website free of charge, from a text editor and formatting facility with easy to use templates, to free server space. Simply type in your own content, and the editor will convert your text into HTML without you ever needing to see the code. Use tradepark on the btclick.com service to join our online business community. Alternatively, if you're feeling brave you may want to try and learn the basics of HTML and become a webmaster in your own right.

Once you have completed your web page, you will want to move it from your machine's hard drive on to the web. This process is known as FTP or File Transfer Protocol, and is the established system used on the Internet for sending files. The site, which will be hosting your page or pages, should give you full instructions for doing this. You can also then add any Ecommerce applications to that website, from taking credit card transactions to checking an order status, you can design your website do as much or as little work as you feel your customers will want. Try some "web DIY" or find a reliable supplier to do it for you.

Scanning pictures

You might wish to add product pictures to your web page. A scanner can be connected to your computer, allowing you to scan in a picture. Scanners work by converting images into bytes of digital information, which can be saved on your computer in a web-friendly picture format such as GIF or JPEG. Once you have scanned your picture, you can add it into your web page before you upload your page to the web. Images can also be uploaded onto your web page straight from a digital camera through FTP.

Ecommerce

Why is Ecommerce important?

Ecommerce, buying and selling or conducting transactions via the Internet, is changing the way many companies and individuals do business. You can already buy an enormous range of products and services online, go shopping for clothes, flowers, furniture - even cars. Ecommerce will have an impact on your company sooner or later, whether it's through your major suppliers or your own customers.

What can I buy online?

Almost anything and everything is available through Ecommerce. From major stores placing their entire inventory online, to smaller specialist stores that have found a niche online audience.

There are even sites, which will compare prices for you shoppers, and deliver products at the most competitive cost.

The benefits

Ecommerce gives customers the ability to browse and purchase products in their own time, at their own pace, without sales pressure and often at special offer prices (to encourage people to keep coming back to the site). For the business owner, it allows expansion into new markets, and to have shop sign saying "open" 24 hours a day. Even if you donít want to sell or buy online, you can give your customers and suppliers access to information about you, your products, or even a map to your office.

Ecommerce considerations

Before you consider setting up an Ecommerce site, you need to find out whether your customers are online, and whether they want to buy products from you online, or if they will want something more unique, like seeing a design or quote online. Perhaps this is a good opportunity to survey your existing customers and ask if Ecommerce would make their lives easier (using your Email to gather the information).

Eventually you can fulfil requests that come from outside your national boundaries, but first establish your local and national audiences for your particular product. Look at why customers would come. Are you offering better prices, better products, or faster guaranteed delivery? You need to assess what your competitors are up to online - how are they marketing themselves, and what special offers are they making to encourage online customers? You then need to let your customers know you are online, too. Submitting your site to search engines is incredibly important so look for advice from your website host or within the search engine's pages.

Security

There have been concerns about the security of Ecommerce and online credit card payments, but the Internet is often safer than giving credit card details out over the telephone.

Messages are encrypted using a system called SSL (Secure Socket Layer) to protect your details from unauthorised access. So when you buy products and services online, you can do so in complete security. Some sites even have special digital certificates, offering further supporting information and guarantees.